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JIM GARRISON'S OSWALD:
A Study In "Imagination"

by Mabeth E. Smoot and Sue B. Fitch

On November 29, 1963 (one week after the assassination of President Kennedy), President Johnson appointed a commission, headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, to "ascertain" and "evaluate all the facts" surrounding the assassination — for the purpose of putting the public's mind at ease. Ten months later, the Warren Commission had completed its work. The Commission published 26 volumes of evidence, and a one-volume *Report* giving its conclusions, based, ostensibly, on the evidence. A substantial portion of evidence obtained by the Commission was not included in the 26 published volumes but was buried as classified material in the Government Archives, where it is to remain for 75 years.

At best, the Warren Commission *Report* is an abortive effort, reflecting political influence, poor scholarship, self-contradictions, and conclusions not based on the published evidence. It did not put the public's mind at ease. Feeling betrayed, the public turned to Warren *Report* critiques — most of them filled with distortions and fantasy, but containing enough facts to give them some credence.

Thus far, the most widely-circulated attacks on the Warren *Report* have been written by left-wingers — such as Mark Lane and Joachim Joesten — who assert that Lee Harvey Oswald was innocent of the murder of President Kennedy. Others, ignoring Oswald and all evidence, steadfastly place full blame for the crime on "right wing extremists."

The Warren *Report's* most formidable critic emerged in February, 1967, when New Orleans' flamboyant District Attorney, Jim Garrison, announced he had "solved" the assassination crime. After a weird-looking homosexual named David Ferrie died suddenly in New Orleans of "natural causes," leaving two "suicide notes," Garrison said Ferrie had been involved in the assassination conspiracy, adding: "We know the key individuals. . . ." He also said:

"I have no reason to believe Oswald killed anybody on November 22, 1963."[1]

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That preposterous statement might have ended the interest of well-informed people in what Garrison had to say; but the next month (March, 1967), Garrison got a grand-jury indictment against Clay Shaw (a New Orleans businessman-socialite) for involvement with Oswald, Ferrie, and "others yet unnamed" in an assassination plot. If he could convince a grand jury, he must have something!

In the October, 1967, issue of the salacious *Playboy* magazine, Garrison revealed some of what he has. He gave an account of the assassination plot and of his investigation, which did not begin until November, 1966, when he "waded through" all 26 volumes of evidence published by the Warren Commission to support its *Report*.[2] This prodigious research feat was apparently completed in a few weeks. Garrison's speed-reading, supplemented by help from "experts" like Mark Lane, led the D.A. to conclude:

"Oswald's professed Marxist sympathies were just a cover for his real activities. I don't believe there are any serious students of the assassination who don't recognize that Oswald's actual political orientation was extreme right wing."[2]

If Garrison had waded through the available evidence with less haste, he could have discovered why even the Warren Commission had to acknowledge Oswald's "avowed commitment to Marxism and communism."[3] If Garrison's claim contained a grain of substance, it would have been fully exploited by the Warren Commission, because members of that team (as well as oddly-chosen members of its legal staff) would have welcomed any shred of evidence indicating that Oswald had a tinge of political conservatism.

Reaching his conclusion with "facts, documents, and reliable eyewitness testimony" — and with "a bit of informed deduction and surmise" to fill in the missing pieces — Garrison claims to have "solid evidence" and "proof" that Oswald was recruited by the CIA while he was in the Marine Corps, nearly two years before he went to the Soviet Union; that Oswald was a CIA agent while in the Soviet Union; and that, in 1963, when the decision was made to assassinate President Kennedy instead of Castro, it became Oswald's role to establish his "public identity as a Marxist."[2]

Actually, Oswald was a self-proclaimed Marxist in 1956, long before there could possibly have been any reason for him to assume such a role as a cover. In October, 1956, Oswald wrote to *The Socialist Call*, asking for information about the Socialist Party, saying:

"I am a Marxist, and have been studying socialist principles well over fifteen months. . . ."[4]

In 1959, Oswald told a fellow Marine, Kerry Thornley, that "the best religion is communism." Thornley testified that while he knew Oswald, it "became obvious" to him that Oswald thought "communism was the best system in the world."[5]

The Marine who knew Oswald best was Nelson Delgado. Delgado and Oswald admired Castro and discussed leaving the Marines and joining Castro. Delgado's enthusiasm for Castro cooled, but Oswald's increased. Delgado was convinced that Oswald was in touch with Cuban authorities in California during the summer of 1959.[6]

In September, 1959, Oswald received a hardship discharge from the Marine Corps, and booked passage on a freighter to Europe. He reached Moscow on October 16, 1959, and applied for Soviet citizenship the next day. Noting the occasion in his diary, Oswald wrote: "I explained I am a communist."[7]

On October 31, 1959, Oswald went to the American Embassy in Moscow to renounce his American citizenship. He told Embassy officials he was a Marxist. When asked to reconsider and return later, Oswald contemptuously left, at the Embassy, his passport and a written statement renouncing U.S. citizenship, affirming allegiance to the U.S.S.R.[8]

Three days later, Oswald mailed a letter to the American Embassy, again requesting that his American citizenship "be revoked," referring to the Soviet Union as "my government."[9]

In November, 1959, Oswald wrote his brother Robert two letters, saying, in part:

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"I will never return to the United States which is a country I hate. . . ."

"I and my fellow workers and communists would like to see the present capitalist government of the U.S. overthrown. . . . Ask me and I will tell you I fight for communism. . . . In the event of war I would kill *any* American who put a uniform on in defense of the American government — any American. . . ."[10]

The Soviet government gave Oswald 5000 rubles (at least $500.00[11]) to pay his hotel bill in Moscow, and gave him an easy job in Minsk — where some 300 Cuban students were studying.[12] The Soviet government also gave him a monthly subsidy, concerning which Oswald later wrote:

"I have never mentioned the fact of these monthly payments to anyone. I do so in order to state that I shall never sell myself intentionally, or unintentionally to anyone again."[13]

After a year in Minsk, Oswald concluded that the Soviets had betrayed Marxism. He began successful negotiations with our State Department to regain his passport, and obtain a loan for passage back to the U.S. for himself, his child, and his wife Marina (member of the Communist Youth Party, and niece of a Soviet Communist Party official).[14]

The cooperation Oswald received from our State Department is a story in itself — illustrating the "soft on communism" policy our government has followed for more than three decades.

Garrison asserts that Oswald's associates in Dallas were "exclusively right wing," and that Oswald was "virtually surrounded" by White Russians.[2] George DeMohrenschildt was Oswald's entre to the White Russian community in Dallas. DeMohrenschildt is a pro-Tito adventurer, and international fortune-hunter, and opportunist. Mrs. DeMohrenschildt (who once greeted Soviet Deputy Premier Mikoyan as "comrade" and invited him to dinner[15]) was known to admire the Chinese communist regime.[16] Genuine right-wingers in the White Russian community of Dallas (such as, Mr. and Mrs. Igor Voshinin and Mr. Ilya A. Mamantov) refused to associate with the Oswalds. They not only suspected Oswald himself, but also had "grave doubts" about Marina because it had been so easy for her to leave the Soviet Union.[17] Mamantov (who interpreted for Marina after the assassination, at the request of the Dallas Police Department), later testified flatly: "Oswald was a Communist . . . ."[18]

At the time of the assassination, the DeMohrenschildts were in Haiti, where they frantically made public statements declaring Oswald's innocence, placing guilt on the FBI.[19]

The Oswalds' prime benefactors in the Dallas area were Mrs. Ruth Paine and her part-time husband, Michael, who, as a youth, attended communist meetings with his father, a Trotskyite enthusiast.[20] Michael Paine shared Oswald's disapproval of the "far right."[21] He admitted that Oswald was a communist, but denied being one himself.[22]

Ruth Paine (whose mother was reported to the FBI as an admitted communist[23]) was a member of the League of Women Voters and of the Quaker Society of Friends.[24] Marina Oswald lived in Ruth Paine's home (at Mrs. Paine's insistence). Though Mrs. Paine was primarily interested in Marina, she also befriended Oswald himself in many ways, and withheld information concerning him from the FBI prior to the assassination.[25] Members of the American Civil Liberties Union, the Paines took Oswald to ACLU meetings where Oswald said he met a fellow communist.[26] Ruth Paine said Oswald joined the ACLU, because:

"He was looking, I'm sure, for other Marxists to be with."[27]

These unique personalities — the DeMohrenschildts and the Paines — were Oswald's closest associates in Dallas; and District Attorney Jim Garrison asserts that Oswald's associates in Dallas were "exclusively right wing."

In May, 1967, Garrison said: "What it took to solve this puzzle was imagination and evaluation."[28]

By this means, Garrison concludes that Kennedy's "assassins were a group of fanatic anti-

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Communists and Cuban exiles," who murdered the President because he was trying to achieve "peaceful relations with the Communist world"; who arranged officer Tippit's murder — somehow; and who planted innocent Oswald in the Texas Theater where he was supposed to be "shot as a cop killer" while resisting arrest; but whose plan went "seriously awry" when Oswald was "merely roughed up and rushed off to the Dallas jail."[2]

Garrison, an experienced District Attorney, finds significant meaning in Oswald's shouting "*I didn't kill anyone — I'm being made a patsy*" (apparently the murderers Garrison has known never deny their crimes); but he ignores the picture of Oswald, after his arrest, giving the raised, clenched-fist "victory" sign of communism. Garrison would have the public believe that Oswald — charged with two murders of which he was innocent, and aware that he had been betrayed by those who had "made a patsy of him"—would still protect those betrayers by continuing, *after his arrest*, to pretend dedication to Marxism,[29] even though he was actually a "right wing extremist"!

Garrison's "evaluations" never lack "imagination." But Garrison does not "evaluate" (or even mention) the fact that, after arrest, Oswald requested and received permission[30] to telephone John J. Abt, a New York attorney who has been identified as a leading communist.[31] Both Garrison and the Warren *Report* ignore Abt's communist affiliations. Both ignore Oswald's explanation to Secret Service agent Thomas J. Kelly that "Abt would understand what this case was all about" and would give Oswald "an excellent defense."[32] After three unsuccessful attempts to reach Abt, Oswald called Ruth Paine twice, asking her to continue the search. She cooperated.[33]

In Garrison's "imagination and evaluation," Oswald's behavior may seem to be that of an "extreme right winger"; but to "serious students of the assassination" it is a small part of the abundant evidence which proves that Lee Harvey Oswald, murderer of President Kennedy, was a communist.

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FOOTNOTES

(1) New Orleans *States-Item*, February 17-28, 1967
(2) *Playboy* magazine interview, October, 1967
(3) *The President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, Report*, p. 23
(4) *Hearings Before The President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy*, Vol. 20, pp. 25-26
(5) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 11, pp. 87-92
(6) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 8, pp. 228-265
(7) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 16, CE 24, p. 94
(8) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 5, pp. 264-267; Vol. 18, CE 908, p. 97
(9) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 18, CE 912, p. 108
(10) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 16, CE 294, p. 814; CE 295, p. 815-822
(11) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 16, CE 24, p. 98
(12) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 5, pp. 406 ff.
(13) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 16, CE 25, p. 122
(14) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 1, p. 89
(15) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 8, p. 463; Vol. 9, p. 215
(16) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 8, p. 465
(17) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 8, pp. 467, 368, 436; Vol. 9, p. 130
(18) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 9, p. 125
(19) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 9, p. 56
(20) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 2, pp. 389 ff.; Vol. 23, pp. 501 ff.
(21) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 2, pp. 402 ff.
(22) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 7, p. 549
(23) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 23, CE 1831, p. 8
(24) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 2, p. 508; Vol. 23, CE 1831, p. 6
(25) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 3, pp. 96 ff.
(26) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 2, p. 408
(27) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 17, CE 460, p. 11
(28) *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 6, 1967
(29) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 4, p. 228; Warren Report, pp. 610, 635; Vol. 7, p. 298
(30) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 7, p. 314
(31) *The Witness*, by Whittaker Chambers, pp. 334, 340, 342, 542; *Out of Bondage, The Story of Elizabeth Bentley*, pp. 237-239
(32) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 24, p. 482
(33) *Hearings* . . . Vol. 24, CE 2073; Vol. 3, pp. 89 ff.

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